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# U. S. playing dangerous double game in Laos

By Kumar Goshal

(Second of three articles on the crisis in Southeast Asia)

**L**AOTIAN NEUTRALIST Prince Souvanna Phouma declared on May 26 that if a coalition government was not formed by June 15, he would return to France and stay there. There was a sense of urgency in his declaration.

Phouma seemed disturbed and annoyed by the apparently contradictory U.S. policy toward the crisis in Laos: the State Department was still trying to pressure its proteges Prince Boun Oum and military "strongman" Gen. Phoumi Nosavan into a coalition regime; at the same time the CIA was reportedly encouraging them to hold back.

"It is not easy to acquire all the details in such a murky situation," the conservative London Times reported (May 24), "but apparently the evidence shows that a swarm of CIA agents in Laos deliberate-

ly opposed the official American objective of trying to establish a neutral government. They are believed to have encouraged Gen. Nosavan in the concentration of troops that brought about the swift and disastrous response of the Pathet Lao."

**STORM IN BRITAIN:** The Times report created a furor in Parliament. In Commons, Prime Minister Macmillan dodged questions about the CIA: in Lords, Foreign Secretary Lord Home replied deadpan to similar questioning: "I am not responsible for the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency—very happily—and therefore cannot answer questions about them."

What the Times described as "the swift and disastrous response of the Pathet Lao," it should be recalled, was the reason President Kennedy gave to rush 5,000 troops to Thailand and a vast armada to Southeast Asian waters. Most of the

troops are deployed along the Mekong River which runs between Laos and Thailand. Phouma apparently suspected that the manner of the deployment of the U.S. forces implied intervention on behalf of Nosavan.

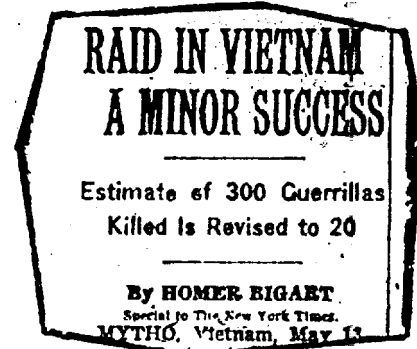
**SCARE HEADLINE:** There were ample grounds for Phouma's suspicion. Nosavan's American friends in Laos had said that "North Vietnamese [and] Chinese-speaking troops were involved" with the Pathet Lao when Nosavan's forces were chased out of Nam Tha early last month; and a scare headline in the New York Times (May 28) said: "PRO-REDS MENACE LAOS BORDER IN RENEWED DRIVE. Attackers Said to Include Soldiers From North Vietnam." It appeared that the stage was being set for U.S. military intervention in Laos.

Similar reports of North Vietnamese and Chinese involvement in Laos, as

Newsweek noted (May 21), had been made in the past in an effort to involve the U.S. militarily, and had proved groundless. UN investigators in 1959 found not a single North Vietnamese when the pro-U.S. Laotian government cried "massive invasion" from the north. The same cry raised in December, 1960, was later blandly admitted to have been raised to obtain more dollars "from the [Laotian] government's friends abroad."

Now the alarm is sounded again, and the Times story with the scare headline reported that "a Thai army unit with two American advisers" has already moved "to within 50 miles of the Laotian border." This was portentous, for in 1960 Thai Premier Sarit Thanarat's forces actively supported the U.S.-sponsored coup which put Thanarat's nephew Nosavan in power.

**EVASIVE PRESIDENT:** In this explosive situation the President seemed unwilling to discount U.S. military intervention in Laos even after a coalition regime was set up. At his May 23 press conference, he evaded a direct answer when he was asked if U.S. forces would be withdrawn



The New York Times, Monday,  
May 14, 1962.

from Thailand once a neutral coalition government was established in Laos. He